

Message Text

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PAGE 01 SAIGON 01850 111327Z

51

ACTION EA-14

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FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1618

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TAGS: ELAB, VS

SUBJECT: CVT TRANSPORT WORKERS PROTEST PRICE OF GASOLINE

1. CVT PRESIDENT TRAN QUOC BUU TOLD LABATT FEB 8, AS AN ILLUSTRATION STEMMING FROM ANOTHER SUBJECT, THAT PRESIDENT THIEU "MAKES MANY PROMISES TO ME BUT DOESN'T CARRY THEM OUT." HE SAID

THE TRANSPORT WORKERS UNION MEMBERS ARE SUFFERING A HARDSHIP DUE TO THE HIGH PRICE OF GASOLINE. THE UNION SCHEDULED A MEMBERSHIP MEETING AT CVT HEADQUARTERSH OR FEB 8. CVT HEADQUARTERS BUILDING WAS ADORNED WITH THE USUAL BANNERS PROCLAIMING THEIR GRIEVANCES. WHEN THE UNION MEMBERS ARRIVED AT CVT HEADQUARTERS THEY WERE MET BY POLICE WHO PREVENTED THEM FROM ENTERING THE BUILDING. AFTER PULLING A COUPLE OF HIS MANY STRINGS, BUU MANAGED TO HAVE THE POLICE BLOCKADE REMOVED.

2. THE UNION GRIEVANCES WERE RATHER SIMPLE: (1) THEY WANTED THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 02 SAIGON 01850 111327Z

GVN TO PREVENT CORRUPT GASOLINE STATION OWNERS FROM DILUTING GASOLINE WITH CHEAPER KEROSENE, A MIXTURE WHICH WAS DAMAGING THEIR ENGINES; (2) THE PRICE OF GASOLINE SHOULD BE ROLLED BACK OR THE WORKERS SHOULD BE PERMITTED TO PASS THE INCREASED PRICE ON TO THE CONSUMER; (3) THE BUS AND TRI-LAMBRETTA BRANCHES OF THE UNION WANT THE GVN TO ISSUE SPECIAL PRICE COUPONS TO THOSE VEHICLE OPERATORS WHO CARRY THE PUBLIC IN LICENSED PUBLIC SERVICE BUSES OR TRI-LAMBRETTAS SO THAT THERE WOULD BE NO NEED TO RAISE THE PRICE OF FARES; AND (4) THEY WANT THE GVN TO PERMIT ACCESS TO GASOLINE ON SATURDAYS AND SUNDAYS SO THAT THEY WOULDN'T HAVE TO STORE GASOLINE IN THEIR HOMES AND RISK A FIRE. THESE VIEWS WERE PREPARED IN THE FORM OF A RESOLUTION WHICH WILL BE SUBMITTED TO THE GVN. THE RESOLUTION ALSO CONTAINED A LINE PROCLAIMING THE UNION'S SUPPORT OF THE GVN POSITION CONCERNING THE PARACEL ISLANDS.

3. BUU RELATED THIS STORY AS AN EXAMPLE OF HOW PROMISES ARE KEPT: PRESIDENT THIEU HAD ALLEGEDLY PROMISED RELIEF FOR THE TRANSPORT WORKERS AND INSTEAD SENT THEM TRUCKLOADS OF POLICE.

4. COMMENT: THE UNDERSTANDABLE DEMANDS OF THE TRANSPORT WORKERS UNION SERVE TO EMPHASIZE NOT ONLY THE PLIGHT OF THE UNION BUT ALSO OF THE GVN. ROUTINE INFLATION THAT AFFECTS THE WORLD ECONOMY IS DIFFICULT ENOUGH FOR THE GVN TO COPE WITH, BUT SINCE THE OIL CRISIS AND SINCE THE COMMUNISTS BLEW UP THE SHELL TANK FARM AT TA BE IN DECEMBER, THE PRICE OF GASOLINE HAS GONE UP DRAMATICALLY, OR 176.5 PERCENT PER LITER OVER WHAT IT WAS PRIOR TO THE DESTRUCTION OF ABOUT 40 PERCENT OF SAIGON'S POL RESERVES, AND ABOUT 55 PERCENT OF ITS STORAGE FACILITIES. GASOLINE PRICES IN THE PAST SIX MONTHS HAVE GONE UP FROM 85 PIASTERS PER LITER IN AUGUST 1973 TO 235 PIASTERS PER LITER ON FEBRUARY 4, 1974, FOR REGULAR GASOLINE. THE TWO NEW PRIVATE BUS COMPANIES (SEPARATE MESSAGE BEING PREPARED) ARE DOING A BRISK BUSINESS. HOWEVER, THE PRICE OF POL CAN HAVE A SERIOUS EFFECT ON THE PRICE OF FARES. THE TRANSPORT WORKERS UNION AND THE PUBLIC HAVE NO ASSURANCE THAT THE PRICE OF OIL PRODUCTS WILL STABILIZE OR BE REDUCED. THE POPULAR HONDA MOTORBIKE MAY HAVE TO GIVE WAY TO THE BICYCLE. ONE WORKER SAID A RETURN TO THE BICYCLE IS SOMEWHAT THWARTED BY THE FACT THAT THE PRICE OF BICYCLES HAS GONE UP FROM 30,000 PIASTERS TO 65,000 PIASTERS.

5. MORE AND MORE BUU CITES DEFICIENCIES IN THE GVN. HE DOES IT SO LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 SAIGON 01850 111327Z

OFTEN THAT THE IMPRESSION IS GAINED HE IS JUST TRYING TO CONVINCE US OF HIS INDEPENDENCE FROM THE REGIME, WHICH IS NOT ENTIRELY THE TRUTH. BUU DOES FAVORS FOR AND SEEKS FAVORS FROM NOT ONLY PRESIDENT THIEU BUT MANY OF HIS SENIOR ADVISERS. THE PRESENCE OF POLICE AT THE CVT COULD HAVE BEEN THE ROUTINE REACTION OF THE POLICE WHO ARE VERY SENSITIVE ABOUT ANY PUBLIC MASS MEETINGS, NO

MATTER WHO SPONSORS THEM. HOWEVER TRUE OR FALSE BUU'S STORY
ABOUT THIEU'S PROMISES MAY BE, IT IS NEVERTHELESS TRUE THAT THE
POLICE WERE USED TO PREVENT UNION MEMBERS FROM ATTENDING A UNION
MEETING.
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